DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 443 628 RC 022 531

AUTHOR Campbell, Richard
TITLE The Psychology of Groups: Why Quality and Impartial Leadership Is Critical to a Group's Success.
PUB DATE 1999-11-00
NOTE 6p.; In: Proceedings of the 13th Annual International Conference on Outdoor Recreation & Education (Jackson Hole, WY, November 1-6, 1999); see RC 022 528.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adventure Education; Conflict Resolution; *Decision Making; *Group Behavior; *Group Dynamics; Group Guidance; *Interpersonal Relationship; *Outdoor Leadership; Safety; *Social Influences; Social Psychology
IDENTIFIERS *Groupthink

ABSTRACT

Many decisions made by outdoor leaders are critical to the well-being of an entire group. Understanding the psychology of groups is important to successful leadership. This paper presents ways that individuals are motivated in groups, how groups respond, some symptoms of problems, and strategies to divert problems that can overwhelm a group. Social facilitation is the increased possibility of accomplishment that results from more people being involved in an endeavor. Social loafing, the decrease in individual effort as group size increases, may be countered by holding people accountable and breaking a large group into smaller ones. People in groups tend to focus on competition, altruism, or cooperation, and groups facilitated in these directions tend to follow the natural flow of group tendencies. Conformity, compliance, and obedience are some social influences that affect groups. Aspects of group decision making include polarization (extremism fostered by group support) and groupthink. Groupthink warrants special attention because of its relevance to outdoor adventure situations, as group members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. Symptoms and antidotes of groupthink are listed. (TD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

"THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUPS: WHY QUALITY AND IMPARTIAL LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL TO A GROUP'S SUCCESS"

Richard Campbell

ED 443 628

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Wm. R. Harwell

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

RC 022 531

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"THE PSYCHOLOGY OF GROUPS: WHY QUALITY AND IMPARTIAL LEADERSHIP IS CRITICAL TO A GROUP'S SUCCESS"

Richard Campbell

Understanding the psychology of groups is critically important to the overall success of your group regardless of the population you work with, the setting of your group, or the established goals of your group. This understanding is essential in many situations related to working with groups in an outdoor education setting. This presentation attempts to describe typical characteristics of groups, potential outcomes based on these attributes, and ways to empower or facilitate groups to develop in positive directions. This presentation and paper is intended to educate outdoor educators, program managers, field staff, expedition leaders, and others that work with groups of people in outdoor settings so that quality experiences can be achieved.

This presentation and paper is an introduction to the processes of groups, what motivates individuals within groups, how groups respond, symptoms of potentially negative group processes, and some possible antidotes.

There are numerous theories and theorists that address groups and group development. There is the classic "forming, norming, storming, performing, and adjourning" theory of group development that many people use in trying to understand how a group evolves. There are also a variety of developmental theories that focus on where individuals are in their own development that effects the outcomes of groups. Chickering is a popular theorist that has identified a theory based on vectors, which focus on college student development. Other developmental specialists include Piaget and Erikson. While their work is invaluable to the understanding of individuals and groups, the focus of this paper will not describe these processes but will highlight other manifestations of the processes of groups.

In the following sections, I will highlight social facilitation, social loafing, conflict resolution, decision making, groupthink, conformity, compliance, and obedience. The list above describes groups and tendencies of individuals within groups. A special focus will be placed on groupthink due to its symptoms and the fact that they are synonymous with many aspects of outdoor education. Along with a detailed description of the symptoms of groupthink, a discussion of possible antidotes to groupthink is also explored.

A tendency of group membership is that the more people involved in an endeavor, the greater the possibility of accomplishment. This is known as social facilitation. If the activity is familiar, then the group setting will improve performance. This should not come as a surprise since it is often the basis of our own programs. A classic example of this is an expedition where many individuals contribute to the success of the group.

An interesting byproduct of social facilitation is social loafing. As a group size increases, individual effort within the group tends to decrease. (Remember the example given by John Gans at the opening address? He described class size in an indoor setting such as his daughter's kindergarten class versus the class size of a typical NOLS group, and the instructor to participant ratios and resulting implications.) Unless the group is extremely collective, individual effort within groups decreases as group size increases.

There are two very specific methods one can use to counter this tendency. One method is to hold people accountable. Another method employed is breaking the large group into smaller ones. These methods have shown good results.

Conflict resolution within groups has some predictable outcomes that when made aware of, can assist a leader in managing strategies to resolve differences. People in groups

RC022531

tend to be focused on three outcomes including competition, altruism, and cooperation. Groups facilitated in these directions tend to follow the natural flow of group tendencies.

Decision making in groups takes on unique characteristics that if left unchecked, can potentially lead to undesirable results. One aspect of decision making in groups is a phenomenon called polarization. Polarization in a group setting is an exaggeration of a group member's original position. Another way of describing this is to envision a group member that has a view on some subject that is at one point on a scale. When that group member and other group members on the same spectrum of the scale are in the same group, they strengthen each other's view and the result is a position that was more extreme than the initial individual position. In this way, extremism in groups takes hold and directs the group. An example of this kind of group (that we discussed in the presentation) is found in some militias. When polarization influences a group, rational decision making is not probable.

Groupthink is another outcome that effects decision making in groups. A definition of groupthink is the process through which a group of individuals remains locked into a particular pattern of thinking, constantly reinforced through daily interaction. This pattern can become so strong that it inhibits development of any alternative perspectives and specifically inhibits emergence of any attitude which questions the perspective which it sustains. Individuality is repressed by the power of the group thought pattern. (Aronson, 1995). Another more concise definition of groupthink is group members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action. Before a more extensive discussion of groupthink is discussed here, I want to highlight some concepts of social influences that may further assist in the exploration of groups and groupthink.

Social influences are constantly impacting groups. Some of the social influences that have been identified include conformity, compliance, and obedience.

Conformity is the tendency of people to modify their behavior to become consistent with group norms. This is more pronounced in smaller groups of three to four people. The Asch studies are very vivid examples of how many people actually modify their behavior to become consistent with group norms. In this study, an individual would typically change his or her mind about the correctness of their own judgement of a relatively easy to solve puzzle.

In the example below, Asch created a study where four people (three confederates and one control person) were asked to judge which line most correctly matched "x". When three people, confederates of the experiment, all chose "c", the fourth person overwhelmingly chose "c" as well. When there was one dissent from a confederate (two people chose "c" and one person chose "b", or "a", then, the last person (control person) answered with the correct observation. Despite the seemingly obvious fact that line "x" and "b" are identical, when people observed others making unanimous but incorrect decisions, their own decision matched the unanimity of the group despite logical and visual sense. This behavior has implications for leaders in many settings (Aronson, 1995).

Modification of behavior based on another's behavior, motivated by desire to gain reward or avoid punishment describes compliance. Strong conviction is not associated with compliance.

Obedience is the modification of behavior based on the command of authority. The classic social psychology studies that illustrate how authority can dictate behavior are the Milgram studies. In these studies, an authority figure dictates to another to administer a shock wave to another person if they answer a question incorrectly. In this study, people would administer shocks increasing in intensity. In fact, when the authority asked to increase the levels of shock to near dangerous levels, the person in the experiment continued to shock the person answering the questions. (Actual shock waves were not administered. Confederates of the experiment acted as if such shock waves were administered. This does raise the question of ethical issues related to these types of experiments. These issues are addressed by social psychologists. I will not attempt to address the issue of ethical experiments except to point out that there is a broad range of views regarding their use.)

When authority appears to know what she or he is doing, then the modification of behavior is more pronounced. This includes authority figure dress, the location of the experiment, etc. Proximity to the authority is another determining factor in establishing the extent to which the obedience is followed.

A good example of how proximity determines obedience can be found in Joseph Heller's novel, Catch 22. During WWII, Dunbar, a character in the novel, is ordered to bomb some Italian villages. Unwilling to openly rebel or harm innocent villagers, he drops bombs over empty fields close to villages but not on them. The closer one is to authority, the more obedient one will be. (Aronson, 1995.)

With this paper, I intend to explore a variety of thoughts related to group and human development. Groupthink is one area that warrants further discussion because of its symptoms and their striking similarity to outdoor adventure situations. The symptoms of groupthink are typically found in isolated groups, cohesive groups, groups that are homogenous, groups empowered to make decisions, and are triggered by stress. If the following symptoms occur, and there is an absence of quality and impartial leadership, groupthink is likely to occur. Of the symptoms listed above, the first five are often found in an outdoor adventure setting. An awareness of these tendencies coupled with quality and impartial leadership can divert the effects of groupthink.

Specific antidotes that can also be used to divert groupthink are to encourage criticism or feedback, seek input from an outside source, and breaking down into smaller groups to look for alternatives. These antidotes can be given to leaders in an attempt to divert groupthink from taking hold of group decision-making processes.

While the definition of groupthink – group members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action – seems somewhat benign, if allowed to take over a group decision making process, negative and even disastrous results can occur. Many tragic examples from history such as Watergate, Hitler and the Third Reich, and the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion have all been traced or linked to groupthink situations.

Many of the decisions that outdoor leaders have to make are critical to the well-being of an entire group. This paper is intended to make outdoor leaders aware of the variety of ways that motivate people, how groups respond, what some symptoms look like, and the antidotes to divert problems. By educating outdoor leaders to some of the issues related to groups and individuals within groups, problems can be addressed in a proactive way. The nature of groupthink and other group processes is that it can overwhelm a group without anyone realizing that it has. By becoming aware of how these processes form, grow, and spread, leaders may be able to develop ways to counter the possible negative effects that they can have on group success and safety

Groupthink

1) Group members' striving for unanimity overrides their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.

2) The process through which a group of individuals remains locked into a particular pattern of thinking, constantly reinforced through daily interaction. This pattern can become so strong that it inhibits development of any alternative perspectives and specifically inhibits emergence of any attitude which questions the perspective which it sustains. Individuality is repressed by the power of the group thought pattern.

Symptoms (of groupthink)

- Isolated group
- Cohesive group
- Homogenous group
- Group empowered to make decisions
- Stress impacts group
- Absence of good, impartial leadership
- (5 of 6 symptoms may be out of one's control)

Antidotes (to divert groupthink)

- Encourage criticism or feedback within the group
- Seek input from outside the group (a neutral, third party agreement)
- Break down into smaller groups and look for alternatives

References

Aronson, Elliot. (1995). The Social Animal. New York. W.H. Freeman Company.

Nadler, R. and Luckner, J. (1992). Processing the Adventure Experience: Theory and Practice. Dubuque, Iowa. Kendall/Hunt.

Biographical Sketch

Rich Campbell is a coordinator of the Outdoor Programs and adjunct faculty in the Health, Leisure and Exercise Science and Freshman Seminar departments at Appalachian State University, Boone, NC. He obtained an MA degree from ASU in Student Development in 1996 and has been working full time with the university every since then.

For more information, contact:

Rich Campbell
Appalachian State University Outdoor Programs
ASU Outdoor Programs
Plemmons Student Union
Boone, NC 28608
Phone: 828.262.2475
Fax: 828.262.6502
E-mail: campbllrh@appstate.edu